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Idaho students score higher than U.S. on national reading test

Idaho fourth and eighth graders scored higher than their U.S. counterparts on a rigorous national reading test, according to scores released today for the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

A random sampling of 2,710 fourth graders and 2,350 eighth graders took the test, also known as the Nation's Report Card, in February and March 2002.

"We are pleased to see Idaho students perform well compared to students across the nation," said Superintendent of Public Instruction Marilyn Howard. "This is a difficult assessment that sets a high standard for a proficient score."

Howard credited the Idaho Reading Initiative, adopted in 1999, with focusing attention on reading. Idaho has been and continues to be a leader in testing the reading skills of all students including students with disabilities and limited English skills.

"If we are to get an accurate picture of student population, we cannot exclude large numbers of students," Howard said.

Howard noted that the NAEP results also reflect weaknesses in the performance of boys, limited English proficient students, Hispanic students, and children who live in poverty. The state already has identified these areas through its assessment program and is addressing those needs through:

- The state's reading initiative that identifies K-3 students who struggle in reading and provides them extra help;
- Reading Academies for K-3 teachers that focus on strategies to reach struggling readers, and;
- A newly acquired federal grant, administered by Howard's office, that provides extra resources to districts in high poverty areas.

The NAEP is significantly different than the state's K-3 Idaho Reading Indicator (IRI). The NAEP focuses on reading comprehension while the IRI

measures foundational skills such as how quickly and accurately a student reads aloud.

The NAEP reports student performance in two ways: average scores and percent of students falling into one of four performance levels: Advanced, Proficient, Basic, and Below Basic. Complete results are available at <http://www.sde.state.id.us/naep/>. Findings from the 2002 data include:

Fourth grade

Idaho fourth graders scored higher than their national counterparts in 2002 and in 1992. The percentage of Idaho students who were at or above Proficient also exceeds the percentage nationally and has increased 4 percent in the past 10 years. Only 11 other jurisdictions had higher percentages of students at or above Proficient.

Fourth Grade Reading National Assessment of Educational Progress		
Year	Average Score	Percent at or above Proficient
1992 Idaho	219	28%
1992 U.S.	215	27%
2002 Idaho	220	32%
2002 U.S.	217	30%

Eighth grade

2002 is the first year for which Idaho has NAEP reading data for eighth graders. That information shows Idaho eighth graders scored higher than their national counterparts and the percentage of Idaho students who were at or above Proficient exceeds that of the nation. Just seven states had higher percentages of students at or above Proficient.

Eighth Grade Reading National Assessment of Educational Progress		
Year	Average Score	Percent at or above Proficient
2002 Idaho	266	34%
2002 U.S.	263	31/%

Other findings from the NAEP release include:

- **Gender** -- Idaho's girls outperformed boys in both grades tested. Idaho girls and boys scored higher than their national counterparts. The gap in performance between boys and girls continues into the eighth grade.
- **Ethnicity** -- Across the nation and Idaho, white students outperformed Hispanic students in fourth and eighth grade. In the fourth grade, scores for Idaho Hispanic performance remained stable since 1992,

although the Hispanic student population doubled during that 10-year period.

- **Students living in poverty** -- In both fourth and eighth grade, students who qualified for free or reduced lunch scored lower than their more affluent counterparts in Idaho and across the United States.
- **City vs. rural** -- Fourth and eighth graders living in Idaho's cities scored higher than those living in rural areas with most of the students assessed (60 percent) living in rural communities.

Today's release is the first of three NAEP releases this year. Scores from the 2002 NAEP Writing Assessment are tentatively planned to be released in July and 2003 NAEP Reading and Math results are expected in September.

State and federal rules require Idaho schools to participate in NAEP, also known as the Nation's Report Card, because it provides comparative results across the states.

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